

I carry a Rubik's Cube in my backpack. Solving it quickly is a terrific conversation starter and surprisingly impressive to girls. I've been asked to solve the cube on the New York City subway, at a track meet in Westchester and at a café in Paris. I usually ask people to try it first. They turn the cube over in their hands, half-heartedly they make a few moves and then sheepishly hand it back. They don't even know where to begin. That's exactly what it was like for me to learn how to read. Letters and words were scrambled and out of sequence. Nothing made sense because I'm dyslexic.

Solving the Rubik's Cube has made me believe that sometimes you have to take a few steps back to move forward. This was a mirror of my own life when I had to leave public school after the fourth grade. It's embarrassing to admit, but I still couldn't consistently spell my full name correctly.

As a fifth-grader at a new school, specializing in what's called language processing disorder, I had to start over. Memorizing symbols for letters, I learned the pieces of the puzzle of language, the phonemes that make up words. I spent the next four years learning how to learn and finding strategies that allowed me to return to my district's high school with the ability to communicate my ideas and express my intelligence.

It took me four weeks to teach myself to solve the cube — the same amount of time it took the inventor, Erno Rubik. Now, I can easily solve the 3x3x3, and the 4x4x4, and the Professor's Cube, the 5x5x5. I discovered that just before it solves, a problem can look like a mess, and then suddenly you can find the solution. I believe that progress comes in unexpected leaps.

Early in my Rubik's career, I became so frustrated that I took the cube apart and rebuilt it. I believe that sometimes you have to look deeper and in unexpected places to find answers. I noticed that I can talk or focus on other things and still solve the cube. There must be an independent part of my brain at work, able to process information.

The Rubik's cube taught me that to accomplish something big, it helps to break it down into small pieces. I learned that it's important to spend a lot of time thinking, to try to find connections and patterns. I believe that there are surprises around the corner. And, that the Rubik's cube and I, we are more than the sum of our parts.

Like a difficult text or sometimes like life itself, the Rubik's Cube can be a frustrating puzzle. So I carry a cube in my backpack as a reminder that I can attain my goals, no matter what obstacles I face.

And did I mention that being able to solve the cube is surprisingly impressive to girls?